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SUBJECT: RUSSIA SEEKS TO RENEW ENGAGEMENT IN THE
NATO-RUSSIA COUNCIL

Classified By: Ambassador Kurt Volker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S/NF) SUMMARY: Allies met with Russian Ambassador Dmitri Rogozin on January 26 for the first time since the Georgia crisis in August 2008. Welcoming the Ministerial decision to re-engage Russia in a phased approach, Allies emphasized that the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) is a tool for fair as well as foul weather. In much more measured tones than usual, Rogozin criticized NATO for abandoning the NRC structure and refusing to hold an emergency NRC on Georgia when it was needed most. Rogozin called for the NRC to function as intended in its founding documents as 27 equal partners acting in their national capacities, and not as a NATO bloc plus Russia. In response, the UK, Canada, Hungary, and Lithuania cited Russia's disregard of NRC principles as the grounds for the Alliance's decision to suspend "business-as-usual" within the NRC. Allies called for more cooperation on Afghanistan, counter-terrorism, and piracy. Rogozin sought a Russian invitation to any upcoming ISAF contributors' meeting. Germany looked for ways for the NRC to re-start its military cooperation with both parties saving face. Defending their principled stance on Georgia, Allies called for Russia to allow full access to OSCE monitors to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Rogozin made an offer for the Russian CHOD to brief NATO on the military events in Georgia, arguing that it would prove to Allies that Russia had not used disproportionate force. Rogozin blamed the recent Russia-Ukraine gas dispute on political turbulence in Kyiv, adding that Russia would not be blackmailed. In a united voice, Allies -- including Spain and Germany -- said the gas crisis cast doubts on Russia's reliability as an energy supplier and urged Russia to avoid a reoccurrence. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) On January 26, the Secretary General presided over the first informal NRC Ambassadorial meeting since the Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008. NATO Foreign Ministers authorized informal NRC meetings at their December 2 meeting.

RUSSIA AND MOST ALLIES READY FOR MORE NRC

13. (S/NF) Allies welcomed the meeting as a good first step towards increased NRC engagement. France, Italy, and Norway said they look forward to normalization of NRC

relations. In contrast, the UK, Canada, Lithuania, and Hungary defended NATO's "no business as usual" policy of not meeting with Russia since the Georgia crisis in August 2008. Ambassador Volker said we should not minimize our differences, but not be mesmerized by them either. Rogozin said that he did not expect the meeting's constructive tone and that Allies had taken the wind out of his sails. He then called on Allies to re-engage in the NRC according to the procedures of the NRC Founding Act and Rome Declaration. Specifically, he asked Allies to act in their national capacities, not to act as a bloc, and to take decisions "at 27" treating Russia as an equal partner.

14. (S/NF) Allies called for more cooperation on Afghanistan, counter-terrorism, and piracy. Ambassador Volker noted that the U.S. hopes to take advantage of the NATO transit arrangement with Russia soon and called on Russia to support our efforts with Kyrgyzstan to extend the lease on the Manas Air Base; Canada also supported the U.S. position (NOTE: During the Political Committee meeting later in the day, Spain noted with displeasure that it has reports that Russia is playing an unhelpful role with Kyrgyzstan on the base renewal. END NOTE). Allies pushed for Russian support on transit; Rogozin said Russia is ready to implement the arrangement as soon as NATO is ready, but discouraged Allies from seeking to expand the list to lethal goods until arrangements with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan were in place. Rogozin wanted Russia to be invited to any upcoming Afghanistan-related meetings, including ISAF contributors' meetings. He suggested regular NRC meetings on Afghanistan with high-level experts to discuss issues, such as the "Talibanization of

Pakistan." Poland, supported by Russia, the U.S., and Turkey, called on Allies to solve the urgent financial problems to allow the Cooperation Airspace Initiative to enter phase III.

MILITARY COOPERATION -- THE BLAME GAME

15. (S/NF) Germany said both NATO and Russia blamed each other for freezing NRC military cooperation, but it is time to get beyond this "chicken and an egg" debate and begin to move forward on re-engaging our cooperation. Noting that Russia had frozen military cooperation with NATO, the Czech Republic asked if Moscow was requesting to re-engage on military cooperation. Rogozin argued that NATO halted military cooperation when it did not certify the Russian frigate for participation in Operation Active Endeavor and suggested NRC Military Representatives find a face-saving way for military cooperation to re-start. (NOTE: In the Political Committee, a number of Allies emphasized the need for political guidance from the NAC before the NATO Military Authorities can resume NRC military cooperation. END NOTE).

GEORGIA - ALLIES STICK TO THEIR PRINCIPLES

16. (S/NF) Allies pushed Russia to allow full access of OSCE monitors in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and to engage in good faith in the Geneva talks. Spain and Canada condemned Russia's disproportionate use of force and its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Slovakia opposed any attempt to change borders by force and found Russian legal and political arguments on the subject to be completely unjustifiable. Germany called on Russia to permit EU monitors to enter the contested regions and to develop relations on the ground between EU monitors and the Russian forces. Rogozin suggested that the NRC invite the Russian CHOD to brief on the events in Georgia, adding that Allies would not accuse Russia of disproportionate use of force after such a meeting. Ambassador Volker cautioned that we need to carefully consider whether to accept this offer since we would be discussing another NATO partner, and it is

more constructive to look forward than backwards.

ENERGY SECURITY - CHEESE IN THE MOUSETRAP

¶7. (S/NF) The U.S., Germany, and Spain joined those Allies directly affected by the Russia-Ukraine gas dispute to urge Russia to avoid a recurrence of the crisis. Allies said the crisis cast doubts on the reliability of both Russia and Ukraine as energy suppliers. Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary characterized it as a security issue. "There is no free cheese, except in a mouse trap," quipped Rogozin, contending that Ukraine should pay the full market price for gas. The conflict, he said, was settled, and besides, the real cause was the political turbulence in Kyiv. He said the EU must impose more controls as the gas enters into EU territory from Ukraine. While defending Russia as a reliable energy supplier, Rogozin said Russia would not be blackmailed by Ukraine. (NOTE: This was the first energy security dialogue in the NRC as both Germany and Russia have previously always blocked any discussion of this subject. END NOTE).

ROGOZIN'S PRESS PERFORMANCE A MIXED BAG

¶8. (S/NF) Rogozin also seemed to try to be more balanced in his press statements before and after the meeting, but he still could not resist the cutting soundbite. After the meeting, he characterized the discussion as "tough, but trust-based and diplomatic" and said that "everything was constructive." He told the press that the resumption of

work in the NRC is only possible on the basis of the principles of the Rome declaration, which were forgotten by NATO during Georgia's attack on South Ossetia. Before the meeting, he told the Russian press that the most important step (NATO) could make is to refrain from any aggressive intentions and expansionism in regards to the geopolitical space that Russia controls.

COMMENT - DR. JEKYLL OR MR. HYDE

¶9. (S/NF) Rogozin, the often fiery nationalist politician, avoided the bombastic rhetoric that so irks the NATO Secretary General and Ambassadors. While not shirking away from Russian positions on Georgia and energy security, his tone was positive and constructive on the value of the NRC for Russia. This contrasts sharply with NRC meetings before the Georgia crisis in which Rogozin would make outrageous statements that he repeated to the Russian press at the meeting's conclusion. The Russian mission to NATO often emphasizes that Rogozin has a direct and positive relationship with President Medvedev. If Rogozin continues to mature as a diplomat and keeps the press-seeking Mr. Hyde under control, perhaps, the NRC channel can be exploited for our mutual benefit. At the same time, we note with concern the willingness of some Allies to air their differences on the speed of NRC re-engagement in front of Rogozin. This is not keeping with the Ministerial agreement that Allies would pre-coordinate positions nor the agreement that NRC formal engagement would not take place before the Secretary General has reported to Ministers. END COMMENT

VOLKER